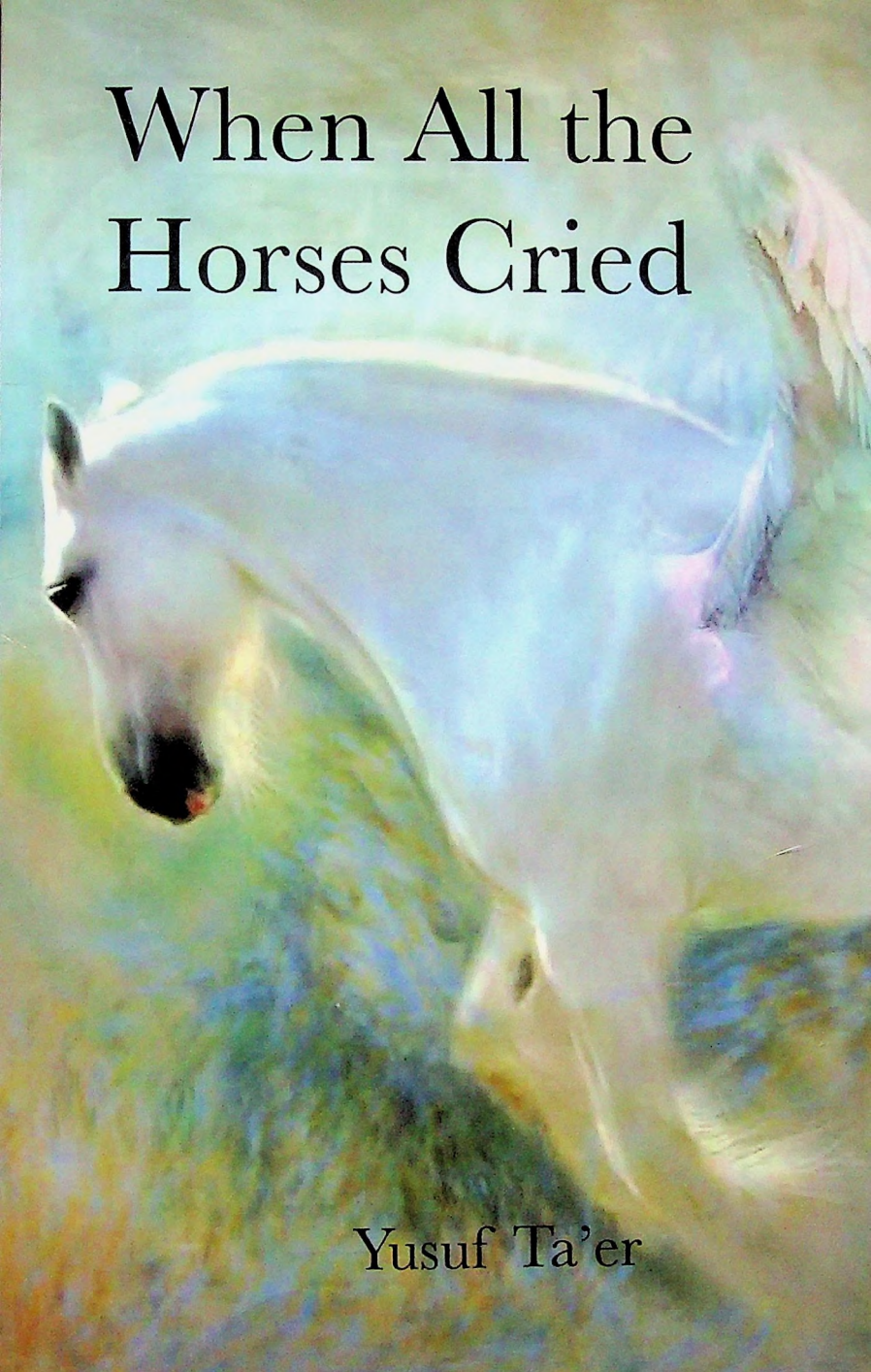
When All the Horses Cried



Yusuf Ta'er

What is the philosophy of Ashura? How does Imam Hussain teach us how to pray? Follow the story of two young horses, Foad and Noor, as they discover the meaning of Muharram through the wise words of their grandfather, Zuljanah. Travel on the life journey of the noble horse of Imam Hussain as Zuljanah takes you through his experience of accompanying the Imam throughout his life, including his journey from Mecca to Karbala - always being at the Imam's side. This beautifully written short story focuses on the spiritual awakening of the heart. It is a resonating work of literature that conveys the depth of Islamic philosophy and the principled values of the Imam to broad audiences interested in acquiring meaningful insights on the path of life.

The Farthest Lote Tree Foundation

The Farthest Lote Tree Foundation is dedicated to reimagining Islamic education to convey the richness of Islamic civilizations in multicultural environments. We are a 501c3 nonprofit organization that relies on community support for all of our activities and productions. Based in Del Mar, CA. Est. 2021.

ISBN 978-1-958882-05-4

90000

9 781958 882054

When All the Horses Cried

Yusuf Ta'er

Copyright © 2022 The Farthest Lote Tree Foundation.

The Farthest Lote Tree Foundation is dedicated to advancing imaginative educational materials that convey the philosophical richness and sophisticated worldview of Islam and Islamic civilizations in a multicultural and plural environment.

The Farthest Lote Tree Foundation is based in Del Mar, California. We are a 501c3 nonprofit organization that relies on community support for all of our activities and productions. All donations are tax deductible. To help support our work, please visit www.farthestlotetree.com/donations.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, email the publisher with the subject line "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the following email address: admin@farthestlotetree.com

ISBN: 978-1-958882-05-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022942779

Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used in a fictional context. All other names, characters, and places are products of the author's imagination.

Printed by Farthest Lote Tree Publications, in the United States of America.

First printing edition 2022.

The Farthest Lote Tree Foundation
Del Mar, California

www.farthestlotetree.com

In the Name of God,
the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

These were not good times. The calamity of Ashura was behind them by many years, and access to the Fourth Imam, Imam Sajjad, was difficult. People were looking out only for themselves, having become selfish and vain. Friendship was not about loyalty or goodness but for having temporary fun and competing to get ahead in life. The spiritually cold yet crowded alleys of Medina were teaming with wily merchants busy selling their goods and eager customers searching for eye-catching bargains: business as usual.

In the midst of such darkness, there was a boy named Foad who spent most of his time with his twin sister, Noor, his closest friend and companion who had the purest of hearts. Foad too was different from most others as a child and was a very kind and sensitive boy. But as the years passed, Foad grew distant from his sister as he slowly began changing for the worst. He was tempted to imitate others' bad behavior, and he became tired of bearing the pressure and pain of his difference, his goodness. He wanted to have many friends, even though they were not good people, and he couldn't stand their taunting and ridicule. His dislike of social loneliness and this bad desire to be loved by anyone made him forget his values and who he was. Especially in public and in front of his new friends, Foad became mean and dismissive of Noor, which greatly hurt her feelings. Foad began to lose care and grew indifferent, in part because he wanted to forget his own pain. He wanted to live like everyone else, to be what appeared as normal, to be loved and to experience love—only that he did not know that this was a false love that would hurt him and prevent him from reaching his true potential. He did not know of true love.

Noor greatly worried about her brother. "How can Foad be changing like this?" Noor lamented with much surprise. "This is not who he is! And this goes against everything we as a family stand for!" The situation was particularly unfortunate, for Foad and Noor did not come from any family, but they were descendants of the greatest and most honorable of horse pedigrees—they were the grandchildren of Zuljanah, Imam Hussain's noble horse. The family lived apart at that time, scattered and separated by a long distance.

Out of her deep concern, Noor began thinking about what she could do to help Foad. She brainstormed different creative plans, but none of them seemed practical. Then, one day, the light turned on, and Noor had an excellent idea: "We should visit Zuljanah! He can help Foad!"

It had been a while since Noor and Foad had seen their grandfather. Zuljanah did not travel; he was old and had become very tired. With her determination and persuasion, she convinced her family and brother to all travel together and see their grandfather. This was to become a special gathering and would greatly impact Foad's life, an event that the young horse had not expected.

Zuljanah perceived the cold distance between Noor and Foad from the instant he saw them. He wondered why twins who had been so close and loving as little kids could have grown apart in this way. He could see the sadness in Noor's eyes and the indifference in Foad's. Disturbed by this situation, Zuljanah immediately set out to help his grandchildren and guide them.

One night, he called upon the twins: "Dear Foad, dear Noor! Please join me. We are going to have a special night tonight." Noor and Foad went over to their grandfather, and they all sat down. "I will be telling you a story—a unique story that will captivate both of your hearts!" Zuljanah believed this would be a good way to advise his grandchildren—he would tell them of his own experiences. They both looked at their grandfather, curious as to what story he would be telling them.

Zuljanah took a deep breath and began to speak in the Name of God:

"There are love stories, and then there is becoming love…true love. Dissolving in the deep sweetness of an ocean of warm milk and rich honey… riding high upon the fragrant breeze and blissful sigh of morning's beauty.

"Not everyone is fortunate to experience such love. Not because they are necessarily undeserving of it, but because they are searching for love in the wrong places.

"Listen to my story, as I have been blessed to have found such love—to have been chosen to become a true lover.

"What more could a lover want than to witness and join his beloved? And especially to see his loved one at his best and most beautiful moment… a vision that would awaken anyone with heart to one's true calling in life.

"It was at that moment of witnessing that I cried. It was when all the horses cried…"

Noor and Foad sat mesmerized, riveted by the start of their grandfather's story.

"My dear beloved called me Zuljanah, meaning one with two wings. Oh how I strived to be a perfect bird for him! Just one glance from his beautiful eyes would send me flying in the high heavens."

Zuljanah fondly smiled while expressing his feelings.

"That's all it took. They were deep and compassionate eyes that conveyed knowledge and righteousness. They made me want to be the best I could be. Eyes that could make a horse take flight!

"His affectionate eyes reminded me of why I was created. Of my forming and molding at the beginning of time and of the sacred oath I had pledged to Him on the day I was made.

"I fell in love with him from the very beginning. I was certain of that. But it was a love that grew deeper and more intense as time went by.

"As a young boy, the sweet and beautiful Hussain would come and play in the stable. I would see him there, my eyes fixed on him as he ran through the old wooden building, in and out of the horse stalls and out under the open skies and back. After daily excursions and military campaigns, the Prophet would bring me back here, where I would spend the night with the other horses. My name at that time was Murtajiz, meaning gift from God."

Noor and Foad both pondered what it would have been like to have personally known Imam Hussain, let alone to be with him when he was only a child! They were indeed aware of the unique story they were being told.

"One day, when I had just come back to the stable with the Prophet, Hussain came and played right outside my stall. For a boy so young, his reserved mannerisms and thoughtful actions reflected a deep wisdom and kind maturity way beyond his years. It was certainly evident that he was the noble son of the noblest of men, Ali, and the noblest of women, Fatima. As always, Hussain's loving presence caught my attention and brought me out of this hollow world. The sweet and fragrant smell of the Prophet's grandson made me forget my exhaustion, hunger, and aching muscles from my long trips.

"That was the day Hussain looked at me for the first time. He stopped what he was doing and slowly walked up to my stall, where I stood watching.

"We locked eyes, and all that remained of this world was the reflection of his beautiful face in the mirror of my pupils. His radiant light instantly struck deep within my heart, piercing into my soul. A deep and magnetic pull carried me in as I melted. I was captured and tamed both at the same time, as I had yearned for.

"In that one radiating moment—an instant that felt like eternity—I knew that I was his. And I knew that he knew that I was his…

"And he knew that I knew, of course."

"That is so beautiful, dear grandfather," Noor declared. "You were so blessed."

"All praise belongs to God," expressed Zuljanah, looking up to the heavens.

"I'm so sorry for interrupting you! Please do continue."

"The Prophet took notice of us and came by. He asked Hussain whether he wanted to ride this stallion.

"I was dizzy with love and happiness, barely hearing Hussain respond: 'Yes, dear Grandfather, I do.'

"To the astonishment of the other people there, I quietly trotted up to the young boy and sat down on my four legs right in front of him before anyone said anything to me.

"Love does not need words, only actions. I did not need any commands. I had already been told, 'Kun fa-yakun'— Be! And I became.

"I was here to carry Hussain. And he gave me this honor. He got on the saddle on my back for me to carry him. In reality, though, it was him carrying me towards felicity."

Zuljanah turned his face towards Foad, looking at his grandson affectionately.

"Love is commitment and fidelity. Love is purest loyalty. My heart was his for God. It was not committed to anyone else or anything else. It was not attached to anything else. It did not stray."

Foad threw his gaze to the ground, his head hung down.

"If we never practice restraining our eyes from what should not be seen…if we try to devour the world with our eyes and pursue trivial curiosities or filthy lusts, then how can the mirror of our eyes be clean and pure enough to see him and to recognize him? How can our eyes only be for him if they stray? My eyes do not want to glance at anything else, for I am in love!

"If we allow our heart to be attracted by everything, to pull at us this way and that, to allow idols and false wants and unbecoming desires to play with the cords of our heart like an untuned harp, how can our heart be loyal and committed to him? How can it sing a perfect song for him? My heart was only for him, my Beloved Hussain!"

The twins listened intently, heavily focused on understanding his words.

"What happened next?" Noor softly uttered.

"Upon seeing us together, the Prophet began crying to the apprehension of others. They felt alarmed and asked why such an endearing scene would usher in such sorrowful tears. Of course, the Prophet knew what they did not.

"The Prophet replied, his voice shaking:

"'You are not aware of what I foresee... A day will come when my grandson will not be able to keep himself in this saddle.' Pointing to me, he explained, with tears in his eyes, 'this very horse, Murtajiz, will then dismount my grandson on the burning sands of the Desert of Karbala with the same consideration, stooping on his four legs and sitting on the ground as he has just done here.'[1] Hussain mounted his loyal horse for the first time now. He would dismount him for the last time at Karbala.

"Everyone cried at this story."

There was silence as Zuljanah took a moment to reminisce upon his sweet

1. "*Husain, the Saviour of Islam*," by S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali, pages 186-187.

memories.

With a sigh of delight, and blushed cheeks, he said: "This was the beginning of a journey of Love, one that would last until the end. It was this Love that was the reason for my creation. It was this Love that guided me throughout life. And it was this Love that would take my spirit back home and herald my return to Him.

"Hussain was this Love, my beloved companion and compassionate master."

***

Foad reflected on his grandfather's words. He had never thought of love in this way. It was different from how he had heard others use the word around him. There was something very nice about it—it felt pure and uplifting in his heart. But he still did not fully understand what it meant.

As if he knew what Foad was thinking, Zuljanah suddenly said, "Love is divine." Foad looked up.

"It is beyond us, beyond time and space too. It is the very fabric of creation, woven together through God's Love."

Noor smiled with happiness. Foad showed no visible reaction.

"God is the source of all love. We must make sure that our love is pure. If it is not, it will destroy true love in one's heart. There is a huge difference between love and lust. The two should not be confused. One who engages in bad things, one who flirts with others, shows undignified and immodest behavior—whether they be a girl or a boy—they tarnish their capacity to truly love."

Foad again pondered on how different it was from what was normally considered. He was disappointed that he had never thought about what love really was and just assumed he knew. It would seem that many people could easily get lost if they did not know the meaning of true love.

"What do we need for true love, dear grandfather?" Noor softly asked, her cheeks turning red.

"We must purify our hearts. Have soft hearts that belong only to God."

"How do we do that?"

"That's easy. We should do good things, and we should not do bad things. We should not simply imitate what others do, especially when it goes against our morals and reasoning. We should love the Prophet and his Family. We should dislike those who oppressed them and were bad to them. And a key to this is prayer."

"Prayer?" Foad asked with surprise.

"Yes, prayer. If our heart belongs to God, if everything we do is for Him, prayer serves as our main meeting place where we can worship Him, where we must acquire a presence of the heart—to have a tranquil heart that knows that it is in the Presence of God and that God is looking at them. As the Prophet said, 'prayer is the Mi'raj of the believer.'"[2]

"What is the Mi'raj?" asked Foad.

"It is the divine journey that Prophet Muhammad took through the heavens to reach God. But allow me to more properly explain to you what it is. Listen carefully to my words..."

Noor and Foad reverently gazed at their grandfather as he began to tell his tale.

***

"Jerusalem and Karbala. The sacred sites of divine ascent. The Prophet went up to God from Jerusalem. And my Hussain went up to God from Karbala.

"It has been twice that a horse has gone on a Mi'raj, once with the Prophet and the other with Hussain. Both times we set off on our spiritual voyages from Mecca, from the House of God. The first time the journey took flight to Jerusalem and the second time to Karbala."

"I'm so proud to be your granddaughter! And so proud to be a horse!" Noor interjected with excitement.

"I am proud of you, my dear—oh light of my eye," Zuljanah responded with a smile.

2. *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 79, page 248, "Al-salat mi'raj al-mu'min."

"Please, grandfather, do continue. Tell us of these two journeys—what were they like?" Foad suddenly asked impatiently. He had become very curious.

Still smiling, Zuljanah cleared his throat and continued the story: "The first journey was fast; the second was slow.

"Like a spark of lightning, a charge of electricity, Boraq's name expressed his rapid mode of transportation to Jerusalem. Fast. Like a spaceship, a UFO. An indescribable and incomprehensible speed. Like a flash in the night, from one sacred site to another, they traveled. And there from Jerusalem, from Masjid al-Aqsa, they flew across the seven skies, where the Prophet saw many wondrous things. They witnessed tens-of-thousands upon tens-of-thousands of brilliant angels worshipping God, meticulously carrying out His commands; scene after scene of beautiful vivid lights of varied colors beyond earthly imagination, green upon green, emerald upon emerald, many green birds of heaven flying in the heights; many noble prophets, from Adam to John and Jesus, Joseph and Idris, Aaron and Moses, sending peace and salutations upon each of them; amazing rivers of light that would cause stupor and astonishment in any soul; a special angel with green hair and white wings—a white color so white, a white that had never been seen before, an amazing green color so green, a green that had never been seen before; the sweetest of aromatic perfumes that stunned the senses; traveling through the magnificent emerald cities that spanned across the lands, spreading light everywhere, with twelve or 12,000 gates, guarded, beneath the mountain peak, preparing for his return; reaching to the Farthest Lote Tree, the majestic and lofty tree marking the heavenly boundary of the known, providing a marvelous cool shade from above, so huge that each leaf was the size of a nation. The culmination of this spiritual journey was the meeting with God, a meeting that would tear one asunder."

"Is that what you saw too?" asked Noor, her eyes wide in bewilderment, trying to imagine all these amazing scenes.

"Not exactly, but in a way, yes."

"What was your journey like?" she asked.

"In the second journey, I was just as radiant and glowing as Boraq as we traversed across the sands with our caravan towards Kufa in the land of Iraq. Kufa

چون محمد جبرئیل بر از — گوش کرد آن پیام روح نواز
زان سخن هوش انتهای مراد — گوش را حلقه غلامی داد
آن امین خدای در تنزیل — وین امین خرد بعقل دلیل

دو امین بر ساختند بکنور — این دو بر آن نزد و سیرت دور
آن پیامبر بود شرط پیام — وین شنید آنچه بود کرده تمام
در شب تیره آن چراغ منیر — شد ز نقش مراتبش پذیر
کردن از طوق آن کمند نجات — طوق ابد خرد چنین شایسته
برتن کرد ابر برات نشست — تا بیش پیرو تا بیابد پست
چون در آورد در عقیل پای — گنبد علوی خرام بیست

was where Imam Ali had ruled and where the Mahdi will establish the seat of his just and noble world government at the End of Time. Imam Hussain had embarked on this travel in response to the invitation of the Kufans to lead them as his father had done earlier, to save them from the cruel and corrupt rule of Yazid.

This voyage of love and loyalty took forty days. The tenth day of Muharram, Ashura, marked the time of ascent into the skies; it brought the forty days beginning from Mecca to an end not in Kufa but in Karbala, the land of agonies and afflictions.

"The Prophet returned from the first journey. My Hussain has not yet returned from the second."

Zuljanah paused and looked at his grandchildren. In a boisterous voice and after a loud neigh, he subsequently asked:

"But why would one who reached Him ever want to return?!"

Foad and Noor were struck by the question and remained perplexed, waiting for their grandfather's next words, hungering for his wisdom.

"The Prophet returned and taught us how to pray. And my Hussain sacrificed himself and his family for Islam in order to teach us how to pray."

There was silence.

"What do you mean, grandfather?" Foad asked after a while.

"Why do we not reflect? Why do we not see, dear Foad?

"The human form of prayer, the Muslim form of prayer, which is not the only form of prayer but is the best form of it, was gifted to the Prophet by God in the Mi'raj. When the Prophet returned from the Mi'raj, he taught his nation how to pray in this best form, the form of prayer where one prays as if they meet God, or they do.

"The presence of heart is key in this spiritual voyage. A pure and clean heart. A

heart that only reflects Him. A heart that always sees itself in the presence of God at all times and in all places. A heart that does not bend to the pressure of that only seeks Him and only seeks to satisfy Him.

"Both the form matters as well as the content—the exterior as well as the interior. To have form without content is meaningless. To pray without a presence of heart, without a good heart, is meaningless.

"The killers of Hussain prayed.

"The killers of Hussain read the Qur'an and swore by it.

"The killers of Hussain killed the grandson of the Prophet of Islam in the name of Islam.

"What use was this empty form?"

Both Noor and Foad reflected on these words, distraught about how bad some Muslims could be and confused about the meaning of being religious.

Zuljanah affectionately gazed at the twin siblings with an intense energy. He then continued his lesson, speaking in a calm voice, progressing in a slow and methodical manner in order to help them see:

"Imam Hussain sacrificed himself and his family in order to teach us the true content of prayer, of purity and God consciousness. In order to teach us what it means to be a noble and righteous human. In order to show us how dignified, honorable, and selfless man can be. In order to teach every one of us the meaning of religion and the proper lifestyle to becoming a good human being, not someone who claims religion but actually lives carefree, seeking fun and material success, lusting for pleasure and fame in this world. It is, after all, only the world that causes the heart to rot; it is the world that is the prison of the believers.

"I was very blessed to be a vehicle in this journey of ascent, like the form of prayer carrying the actual prayer up to the skies for Him.

"I was witness…I am witness. Then why would you not see things through my

eyes and heed my advice? Look through them if you are wise—through the eyes of someone who has seen."

***

Foad went into deep thought at these words, realizing that it was wrong of him to have let himself be affected by the pressure of others and his own unbecoming desires. He reflected upon how he had always known what was right and wrong and became aware that he had fallen into a kind of sleep as he tried so much to be popular, wanting to be accepted by others and not wanting to be made fun of—to be normal, to be supposedly loved, to be praised. A warm appreciation of his grandfather and his wise words sparked in his heart, awakening Foad of his slumber and strengthening his will to do what was right.

He looked at Noor and felt ashamed of his past behavior.

Then a word lit up in his consciousness: dignity. He realized that he hadn't acted with dignity. One must not do something to just please others or to get what one wants—that would be undignified.

He thought and grappled with the meaning of the word dignity—what did it mean?

"Was Ashura about dignity, dear grandfather?" Foad asked.

"Dignity is one of the main messages of Ashura, my dear—oh eye of my heart," Zuljanah lovingly said to his grandson.

"How so?"

"Hussain did not lower himself for anything besides God. He did not compromise over anything that would have tarnished his dignity in the eyes of God. He resisted all forms of vice for the dignity of himself and his family, his parents, and his grandfather—for the dignity of Islam. One who knows dignity and lives by it will be preparing themselves to know the meaning of true love."

Foad stared out ahead of himself in thought and contemplation. After a while,

he turned his face towards Zuljanah, a determination in his eyes.

"Show me, dear grandfather. Please tell me. Remind me of Ashura. Tell me of your journey in Muharram. What happened? Was Hussain worried and in fear? Were you afraid? What did you do? I want to hear everything from you," Foad requested with thirst.

"No, Hussain was not afraid or worried at all," Zuljanah responded with pride. "He was completely at peace from the very beginning of the voyage with full knowledge of his destiny."

Foad and Noor listened intently as Zuljanah re-started his narration:

"'Welcome to your return unto Me!' These are the words God says to good souls when they leave the body. God said that this is so to Prophet Muhammad in the Mi'raj.[3]

"Upon leaving Mecca for Karbala, Hussain's heart was at full ease and filled with peaceful tranquility as it could vividly hear God's welcoming. He was ready and more than content, excited and happy for his Return. He was traveling for God, having left his home and abandoned everything, including himself, as a refugee for God, to serve Him with humility.

"God says: 'And whoever leaves his home migrating for the sake of Allah and His Messenger and death overtakes him, then, his reward is established with Allah. And Allah is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful.' (Qur'an 4:100)

"I marched nobly across the sands towards Karbala, as honorably as I could, feeling shame that my grace was of no match to the beauty and magnificence of the real man I was carrying.

"Unlike my Master, my heart was pounding throughout the way. I could not differentiate my loud heartbeat from the sound of my hooves hitting the dead ground beneath my feet.

"I was witnessing the cycle of time, witnessing the closure Hussain was giving to Abraham's unrealized sacrifice—the sacrifice of his son, Ismail. Soon, Hussain would sacrifice himself to God. He would sacrifice his youngest son, Ali Asghar,

3. Hadith of Mi'raj in Hasan b. Muhammad al-Daylami, *Irshad al-Qulub*, Vol. 1, pages 373-382.

as well. He would sacrifice everything for Islam.

"And they would kill them."

"How could they do that?!" screamed Noor, tears emerging in her eyes. Foad's muscles were all tense with anger as he listened.

"Didn't that make you angry, dear grandfather?" she asked.

""Yes, of course, it did. I was angry at the human species. Dumbfounded and incensed by how bad people could be. Some were murderers, whose black stone hearts were filled with greed and contempt, those who were bloodthirsty.

"There were those who betrayed, who called on Hussain and pledged, but who turned away heedless and scared, who were not men of their word, who were undignified because they engaged in undignified and immoral actions. And there were others who did not care at all and were too indifferent and selfish. They were too busy with their own lives and their worldly attachments that it did not even matter that the grandson of the Prophet was in danger.

"In these moments of great anguish, I remembered the story of the angels who asked God why He created mankind when they would wreak so much havoc on this earth! God replied that they knew not what He knew regarding why He created man; and this calmed me.

"It calmed me because I knew."

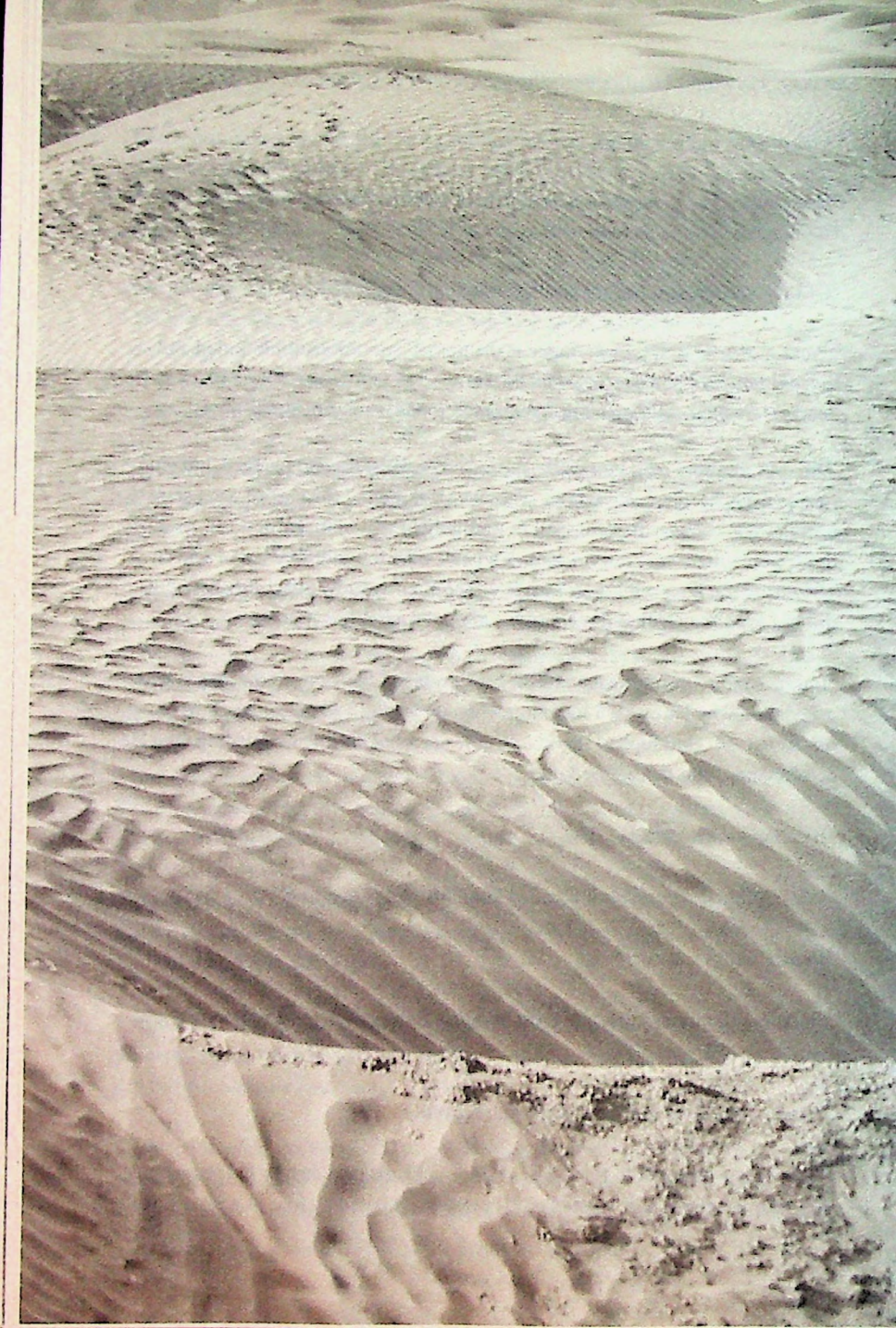
"Why? What did you know?!" asked Foad with great curiosity.

"I knew who I was carrying."

There was silence as everyone tried to digest the meaning and weight of those words.

"I knew who I was carrying," Zuljanah repeated.

"I wanted to just melt in the sands of time and turn into dust in his presence. Everything should have melted in his presence. Melted by love in a return to



Him.

"How could I, a horse, know and love God, who is so great and so magnificent that my mind could not possibly even fathom Him? My heart and my thoughts were incapable of understanding His greatness because I was so small and He, was so big."

Noor concentrated her eyes on her grandfather, and Foad contemplated.

"God teaches us to see everything as signs, to carefully read creation with our hearts and find our way back to Him.

"The best signs are the best reflections of all of God's noble Names and Attributes, demonstrating to us the meaning of mercy and love, knowledge and wisdom, patience and magnificence. The best signs are the Ahl al-Bayt, the Imams and the Family of the Prophet. They best reflect all these beautiful Names and Attributes. To know what mercy is, know them. To know what kindness and beauty are, know them. To know what wisdom and patience are, know them.

"This is what the angels did not know: that man was made in the Image of God, as the best reflection of Him.

"I knew God because I knew Hussain.

"I loved God because I loved Hussain.

"Hussain was pure Love.

"It would be impossible, otherwise, to truly know and love God without knowing those whom He loved most, those who best reflected His Attributes."

Everyone reflected on these words.

"Is it possible to reach God?" Foad asked.

"Yes. Certainly."

"How is that?" Foad persisted.

"God created a ladder to reach Him, a ladder from our hearts up to the skies; that is the Light, the Light of the Ahl al-Bayt. That is His Light. It is in our hearts, and we carry it like a lantern.

'Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: Lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things.' (Qur'an 24:35)

"We are all tasked with carrying this Light in our hearts, as I had the fortune of carrying this Light, Imam Hussain, as part of his caravan to Karbala. We are all tasked with making sure we are dignified and honorable enough to deserve to even carry the Light of the Ahl al-Bayt— an honor which we can never truly deserve, as we are in absolute poverty. But it is in truth a great mercy and divine blessing He has granted us: the duty and possibility of servitude to carry this Light in our hearts. Make sure that your heart is clean and pure, otherwise, the lantern cannot shine…"

A few tears rolled down Foad's cheek, and he repented to God in his heart for what he had done, asking for forgiveness—determined to never go down the wrong path again. He wanted to be worthy of true love.

Noor noticed his tears, casting secret glances at her brother. While her heart was sad from the story of Karbala, a hope and happiness pressed against her chest as she believed her brother was realizing his mistakes and would change his ways.

"Please continue explaining what happened on Ashura," Foad requested of his grandfather with determination.

"I cannot explain to you what happened on Ashura. I cannot describe to you Karbala. You have to be there to know.

"So be there.

"Be there now, through polishing your soul."

Foad broke down crying. "

Standing still, with grief, I could only try to fathom the pain experienced by Hussain and the patience he showed as he watched his valiant friends and dear family members fight with honor and dignity and innocently become martyred one by one—massacred by the heavy onslaught of Yazid's forces.

"Until it was Hussain's turn…

"Imam Hussain was being painfully plucked of feathers, while I was growing wings.

"The arrows launched at Hussain pierced my sides, quickly gathering and taking shape, assuming the form of gallant wings, one on my left and one on my right, as I went around in a circle trying to protect my Hussain. This was why Hus sain called me Zuljanah at this time, and why you know me by this name. The arrows from which I shielded Hussain pierced me from both sides and gave me wings: Zuljanah, the one with two wings.

"No matter how much I tried, though, my Hussain became gravely injured.

"I fiercely screamed and I shouted, but these people had no ears to understand what I was saying.

"Then Imam Hussain said to me: 'Wilt thou, my dear Zuljanah, kneel down a little to enable me to roll myself down to the ground? I know thou hast also been hungry and thirsty along with me. Pardon me, my dear Zuljanah, for Hussain does not have many helpers. May the Lord bless thee.'"[4]

Noor and Foad cried loudly as they tried to imagine the scene, hearing Imam Hussain's words to their grandfather.

Zuljanah cried too, as he continued telling the story:

"I kneeled, crying as my innocent Hussain collapsed onto the ground. Oh how kind and respectful and loving he was always with me. Even in such a state, he spoke so kindly to me though he was in so much pain and agony! Hussain

4. *"Husain, the Saviour of Islam,"* by S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali, pages 186-187.

always demonstrated his selflessness. I sweated from shame at the extent that he cared for me and that he asked me for pardon for not feeding and drinking me, while I just flapped my wings helplessly in agony, unable to do anything for my dearest Hussain.

"So why don't we learn and see?"

Noor and Foad both continued shedding tears, both ashamed of themselves and in shock at how people could treat Hussain in such a way.

Zuljanah crescendoed:

"I could not stop crying and screamed feverishly into the skies at the pain and horror of the cruelty that was happening before my eyes. I shouted: 'Rage! Rage at the nation that killed the son of the daughter of its Prophet!'[5] How could there not be retribution for what they had done? I was certain of the retribution!

"I lovingly kissed his noble face repeatedly, my tears flowing on his body on the plain of Karbala.

"'I love you.'

"'I love you,' I repeated, sobbing."

They all cried together, a burning love glowing in their hearts like a candle flame.

Having calmed a bit, Zuljanah continued:

"God welcomed Hussain back Home that day—oh what a wonderful Home-coming it was! God said: 'O soul, in complete rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord, well pleased, and well-pleasing unto Him!' (Qur'an 89:27-28).

"How dignified and honorably Hussain lived and Hussain died—I prayed to God for such a life and such a death!

"But no matter what I said and however much I cried, those people there, those murderers, could not understand. Their hearts were cold; their hearts were

5. *Nasekh al-Tawarikh*, Vol. 3, page 5.

stone, sealed by God Himself due to their malign ignorance and malice.

"While they were blind and could not see, all the horses there understood very well.

"All the horses cried at this scene..."

The pause in Zuljanah's story was filled with the sound of tears.

"So...aren't we...better than humans?" Noor asked in between her breaths from crying.

Zuljanah thought about her question for a moment but understood why she would ask this.

"Yes and no," he responded. "God created man in a form that could be higher than angels but also lower than animals. Oh what an angelic man Hussain was! And how disrespectful of the name animal it would be to call upon the killers of Hussain by this name. We horses were more human than these!" Noor reflected on these words, pleased by the answer.

"Please continue the story, grandfather," urged Foad.

"After a while, dazed and in a state of bewilderment and grief, my heart aching in pain, I ran back alone, without my Master, to the distant tents. Hussain's family was solemnly waiting there for news, praying to God and calling upon Him. When they saw me alone, they all started wailing and crying, beating themselves in grief. They ran toward me, throwing themselves upon me and crying, trying to grasp any remainder of Hussain's scent still upon me. I was still, with tears streaming down my neck, preserving my dignity in honor of Hussain and out of respect to his family who was crying and grieving heavily before me.

"But the straw that broke my back and dispelled the reserved appearance I upheld was when one of Hussain's little daughters came up to me, crying, who asked: "Did anyone give my father some water, or was he killed thirsty?"[6]

"Upon hearing those words, tears gushed forth from my eyes, and I walked away from everyone and went behind the tents to be alone.

6. *Anwar ash-Shahada*, page 23.

"I threw myself to the ground sobbing, and I started pounding my head against the ground over and over again until I passed out and remembered no more..."

***

All three continued their sobbing until after a while they started to calm down. The night was coming to an end. The sound of the green crickets began to fade. They had been speaking all through the night.

Noor looked at her grandfather and asked, "Then what happened afterwards? We want to know the rest."

"Lady Zaynab's hand went through my mane, back and forth, caressing and calming me from this painful calamity—my memory started coming back to me then. I saw and I realized that I now had Hussain's son, Ali, on my back, and I had to carry him safely and with honor. Oh how my heart burned with pain as Hussain's son, Imam Sajjad, was a prisoner on my back, his hands tied by these ugly and evil captive-takers! But I had no more time to grieve, and I had to control myself, as our journey to Damascus was about to begin...

"Generation after generation, from father to son, I was always committed to the service of the Ahl al-Bayt. I had to have high perseverance and steadfast patience for this lofty mission, traits made possible only through my love for them and for God."

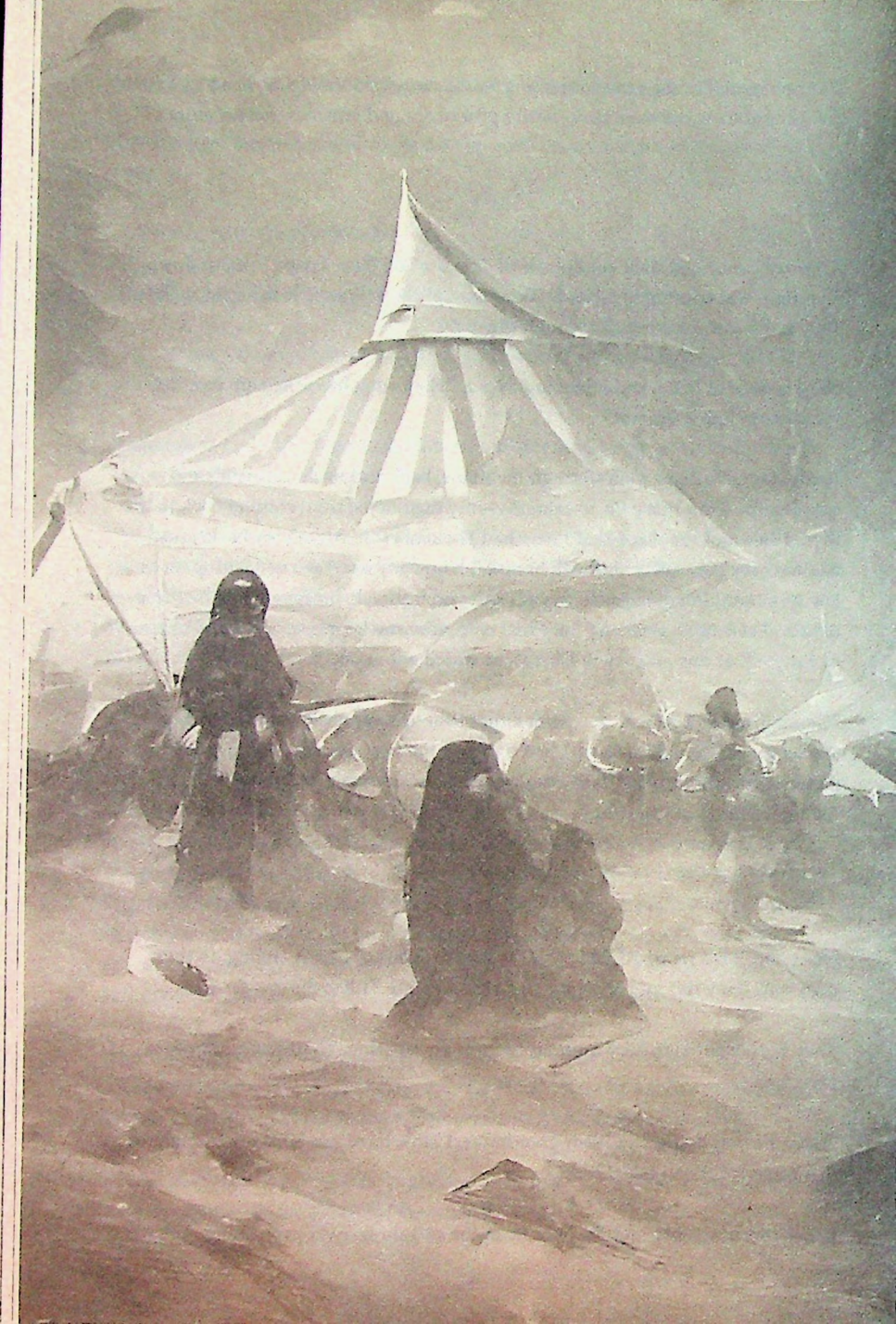
***

Noor and Foad renewed their vows of love for Hussain. Each sibling, in their own way, felt wiser and less confused after hearing Zuljanah's story.

They both wanted to hear more from their grandfather. Their respect for him was great.

"How are you doing now, dear grandfather? How have you borne the weight of this tragedy?" Foad asked kindly.

It was morning now, and the light from the sun shone over everything, radiating



from the East.

"Time has flown by across the years, but my love for Hussain has never waned. I miss him so very much, my heart aches a sharp and agonizing pain from our separation. This tragedy is with me forever. Tears quickly swell in my eyes and a painful lump in my throat appears whenever I remember my dear Hussain. And the memory and thoughts of his words and his beauty and his actions have never left my heart for a moment. And here I am now, close to my death, close to the time that I can see him again and be with him fully again. My flesh will soon decompose in the earth, but my spirit will always live with him.

"What does the future hold, you ask?"

The twins were eager to hear what their grandfather had to say. "I never cease to pray for the reappearance of the Mahdi—what better prayer than this? To wish for God's wish for the culmination of sacred history like this, to reveal His final proof to good and bad alike and demonstrate for all the Truth over which they quarreled, to let people see and taste the Justice that had evaded humankind across the millennia. This movement toward this bright future—the Imam—was why this world was created. This is the heart of Islam, so we must strive to become one with this purpose. We must strive to serve him.

"So please do so, my dears. Make this prayer. Have this desire. And serve always. Never forget."

"Yes, of course, we will commit to doing these!" both Noor and Foad exclaimed.

Zuljanah smiled approvingly, delighted at the sincere intentions expressed by his grandchildren.

"Will we see his return?" Foad asked gently, with curiosity. "I greatly want to be there to see and to help in any way I can."

Zuljanah quickly responded: "I always pray to God to revive me and allow me to be there at the Imam's side when he returns at the End. To resurrect me from my death and to raise me from my grave so that I can help him. And so that I can see. You can make the same prayer. But live your life now accordingly...

there is no need to wait to act justly. Be his follower now and support him every day. Your daily lifestyle and actions should imitate those of Hussain's. Live as he would.

"To avenge Hussain's martyrdom is a right belonging to Imam Zaman, the Imam of Time. But we also have a role to play, as our life and our story are tied to our love, our Hussain.

"When the Imam returns, we will be there by his side, God willing. The Prince will come back on his white steed. That is how it has always been. And that is how it will be.

"This Return will not mark the End, but, rather, it will herald a new Beginning where we can finally all witness, witness what the horses had already seen."

***

Since that pleasant day, many years had passed. While Zuljanah was now gone, his story always remained in his grandchildren's hearts. Foad and Noor had each gotten married and had many kids now, teaching their children the same story and showing them the way. Foad always remained committed, his eyes having been opened by the sacrifice of Hussain. And he always read a special prayer given to him by his grandfather, a prayer from the Hadith of the Prophet's Mi'raj, which he would repeat for the rest of his life over and over again:

اَللَّهُمَّ إِنَّ ظُلْمِي أَصْبَحَ مُسْتَجِيراً بِعَفْوِكَ وَ ذَنْبِي مُسْتَجِيراً بِمَغْفِرَتِكَ وَ ذُلِّي مُسْتَجِيراً بِوَجْهِكَ اَلْبَاقِي الذي لا يَفْنىٰ

"O' Allah! Verily I appeal for relief from my oppression through Your pardon, and I appeal for relief from my sins through Your forgiveness, and I appeal for relief from my own insignificance through Your Everlasting Countenance which will never cease to exist."[7]

7. *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 18, Bab 3, Hadith 34, pages 329-330, "*Ithbaat al-Mi'raaj wa ma'naahu wa kayfiyyatuhu wa sifatuhu wa ma jaraa feehi wa wasf al-buraaq.*"

This book was produced by
The Farthest Lote Tree Foundation

Visit us and view our other projects at *www.farthestlotetree.com*

Further explore the philosophy of Ashura with our complementary guidebook for *When All the Horses Cried.*